DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 455 421 CE 082 070

AUTHOR	Gibson, Cynthia M.
TITLE	Stronger Links: New Ways To Connect Low-Skilled Workers to Better Jobs.
INSTITUTION	Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, MD.
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	40p.; A joint effort of the Casey Foundation's Jobs Initiative, Jobs for the Future, Abt Associates, Inc., and Metis Associates.
AVAILABLE FROM	Annie E. Casey Foundation, 701 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21202. Tel: 410-547-6600; Fax: 410-547-6624; Web site: http://www.aecf.org. For full text: http://www.aecf.org/jobsinitiative/strongerlinks.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; *Agency Cooperation; Community Involvement; Community Organizations; Community Role; Demonstration Programs; Education Work Relationship; Employer Attitudes; *Employment Programs; Income; Institutional Cooperation; *Job Placement; *Labor Force Development; Labor Needs; Labor Supply; Labor Turnover; *Low Income Groups; Organizational Development; Outcomes of Education; Partnerships in Education; Salary Wage Differentials; School Community Relationship; *Unskilled Workers
IDENTIFIERS	Colorado (Denver); *Intermediaries; Louisiana (New Orleans); Missouri (Saint Louis); Pennsylvania (Philadelphia); Washington (Seattle); Wisconsin (Milwaukee)

ABSTRACT

The Jobs Initiative, an eight-year demonstration, helps low-income residents find jobs that pay family-supporting wages in Denver, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Seattle. "Entrepreneurial intermediaries," ranging from a private foundation to a city agency, manage six sites that take a dramatically different, long-term approach emphasizing comprehensive strategies that fuel community-based work force development. They have a dual customer focus, meeting needs of supply (workers) and demand (employer) sides; identify and secure entry-level jobs offering low-income people livable wages, benefits, and opportunities for wage and career advancement; build on job-seekers' strengths and respect their talent, dignity, and self reliance, while providing support services; increase dialogue, communication, and understanding among stakeholders; provide community-based organizations with sustained support and technical assistance; stress outcomes-based management; and suggest and provoke broader systemic change leading to more effective jobs and work force development programs and policies. Site results indicate that individuals placed in jobs had experienced significant hourly wage and earnings increases; more than twice as many had medical benefits; and more than half had been employed 12 months. Requirements for meeting workplace demands are employer engagement; employee retention and advancement; collaboration; and building organizational capacity. (YLB)

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New Ways to Connect to Better Jobs

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation's

Jobs Initiative

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The Annie E. Casey *Jobs Initiative* is an eight-year, six-site demonstration effort designed to help low-income residents living in designated neighborhoods find jobs that pay family-supporting wages. All of the sites are managed by "entrepreneurial intermediaries" that represent varied types of organizations, ranging from a private foundation to a city agency. Information about the *Jobs Initiative* and new developments in workforce reform can be found at: www.aecf.org/jobsinitiative.

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Executive Summary

In Denver, strategically developed products and services give employers and entry-level workers a common language for problem resolution, improving the ability of low-income residents to succeed in jobs at a growing number of companies.

In Milwaukee, inner-city residents are trained in state-of-the-art printing technology and then matched with employers in an industry that desperately needs entry-level workers.

In New Orleans, faith-based coalitions, public-housing residents, business leaders, community college administrators, and others are working together — many for the first time — to create a strong workforce in two of the city's poorest neighborhoods.

In Philadelphia, a public/private partnership involving a local industrial-resource center, schools, interfaith groups, and community-based organizations trains under-employed workers for machinists' jobs that, until now, have gone unfilled.

In St. Louis, a local community college and community-based organization partner to provide a combination of technical skills and work readiness training that has been successful in finding jobs for the hard to employ — and helping them keep those jobs. There are plans to replicate the program in several other cities.

In Seattle, a citywide, sector-focused effort that offers technical and soft skills training, case management, support services, and after-placement programs has placed more than 1,400 people into living-wage jobs. Nearly 90 percent of them have been retained for at least six months.

THESE STORIES ARE NOT ISOLATED INCIDENTS OR MERE COINCIDENCE. They are just some of the most innovative programs that have emerged from a carefully planned, strategically funded, and thoughtfully implemented process to reform the labor market for low-income young adults in six cities. Launched in 1995, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's eight-year, $30 million *Jobs Initiative* provides support and assistance to community-based organizations, city agencies, local foundations, and other groups that help low-income workers secure living-wage jobs with benefits and advancement opportunities.

Recent and dramatic changes in the political and economic landscape — including a dearth of family-supporting jobs for low-income people and the move to a welfare system based on work and time-limited benefits — demand these kinds of new models. Experience has shown that a relatively narrow focus on job training and job placement, the centerpiece of traditional workforce development efforts, has often failed to address the complex needs of distressed inner-city neighborhoods with high unemployment rates.

The reason for this lack of success is largely twofold: traditional job-training or placement programs were usually designed with little thought as to whether they actually meet employers' needs, and these programs often overlooked the importance of employee retention and advancement in sustaining communities' economic growth, development, and viability. As a result, graduates tended to end up in low-wage jobs, receive little after-placement guidance or support, and, predictably, drop out of employment for a variety of reasons — a lack of child care or transportation, housing difficulties, or workplace conflict.

Strategies for Workforce Development

The sites in the six cities targeted by the Casey Foundation's *Jobs Initiative* take a dramatically different and long-term approach — one that eschews one-shot, short-term job training or placements and, instead, emphasizes the following comprehensive strategies that will fuel community-based workforce development:

- HAVE a dual customer focus, meeting the needs of both the supply (workers) *and* the demand (employers) sides of the workforce development equation — a focus that better serves employers' needs and bolsters the likelihood of job success among entry-level workers.

- IDENTIFY and secure entry-level jobs that offer low-income people livable wages, benefits, and opportunities for wage and career advancement.

- BUILD on job-seekers' strengths and respect their talent, dignity, and self-reliance, while providing them with support services during and after placement — a safety net that bolsters entry-level employees' chances for getting, staying, and advancing in a job.

- INCREASE dialogue, communication, and understanding among various stakeholders who are working across sectors and institutions to alleviate poverty and create new economic opportunities for all residents.

- PROVIDE community-based organizations — including community colleges, interfaith coalitions, training centers, support service agencies, employment associations, and others — with sustained support and technical assistance that helps them build their organizational capacity and meet workforce development goals.

◆ STRESS outcomes-based management by requiring sites to develop business plans, set performance targets, and evaluate progress by using quantifiable measures such as job placement, retention, and costs.

◆ SUGGEST and provoke broader systemic change that will help lead to more effective jobs and workforce development programs and policies at the local, state, and national levels.

Using these strategies as a framework, each site has developed its own unique method for tackling jobs and workforce development issues in its city. Sites began their efforts with a one-and-a-half-year planning process, followed by three years of capacity building that, together, laid the groundwork for a four-year, full-scale systems reform phase that officially began early in 2000.

Demonstration Site Results

As they prepare to move toward full-scale operation, the six demonstration sites have begun to achieve some results, according to preliminary data:

AS OF DECEMBER 31, 1999, more than 8,800 individuals have enrolled in programs offered by the six sites. Nearly 58 percent had annual family incomes of under $9,000, and close to 50 percent received some form of public assistance prior to enrollment. Enrollees are also a racially diverse group: 60 percent are African-American, 12 percent are Hispanic, and 9 percent are Asian. Men and women are equally represented.

COMPARED TO THEIR EXPERIENCE before enrollment, individuals placed in jobs through the initiative have experienced significant hourly wage and earnings increases — from $8.09 to $9.15 per hour, representing a gross annual salary increase of $2,250 — and major improvements in rates of employer-provided medical coverage.

PRIOR TO THE INITIATIVE, only 31 percent of participants had access to medical benefits; after enrollment, that rate more than doubled to 82 percent upon initial placement.

AFTER PLACEMENT, *Jobs Initiative* participants, on average, tended to work longer weeks and more weeks per year than they did prior to enrollment, which leads to greater earnings. The average weekly earnings for people with some prior work experience placed in jobs through the *Jobs Initiative*, for example, rose from $323 to $370.

SEVENTY-FIVE PERCENT of those individuals placed early enough to achieve a projected milestone have stayed on the job for three months. Sixty-nine percent have stayed for six months. More than half have reached twelve-month retention benchmarks.

It is important to note that this process has not been without challenges. Most of the sites, for example, have accomplished their work with relatively small staffs and limited budgets and through funded projects, contracts, and partnerships. They are also only halfway through the process. Still, the data collected thus far (although by no means a final evaluation) suggest that the creative strategies being employed by the six demonstration sites are making inroads toward the difficult task of placing and retaining low-income citizens in good jobs.

Lessons Learned

Another important by-product of the *Jobs Initiative* is a set of lessons learned. Four overarching lessons cut across all the sites:

EMPLOYERS MUST BE ENGAGED in workforce development at the beginning of the process and viewed as collaborators in that process. Standard job-training programs tend to treat employers as an afterthought or leave them out of the process altogether. The result is a workforce that is unable to meet employers' demands and needs; thus, low-income residents tend to be overlooked as a viable source of labor. When attention is paid to brokering new relationships with potential employers and encouraging them to work collaboratively with community-based organizations in training and hiring underemployed people, inner-city residents get good jobs, and employers get a skilled, stable workforce.

EFFORTS TO INCREASE worker retention in the labor market are as important as job placement and must be targeted toward employers and employees alike. Employers who understand the extraordinarily expensive impact high turnover has on the bottom line need to take a more active role in ensuring that entry-level workers from diverse backgrounds succeed in the workplace. Employees need to be encouraged to stay in jobs and establish a stable job history, which can lead to greater wage-earning potential or career advancement. Both constituencies need opportunities to learn about one another's concerns so that the potential for misunderstanding or conflict — factors that can contribute to high turnover — decreases.

LINKING LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS with family-supporting jobs that offer career advancement ultimately requires broad systemic change and buy-in among all affected stakeholders — low-income workers, employers, elected officials, community-based organizations, government agencies, and others. No single system can improve the lives of families living in communities of concentrated poverty. Long-term, positive change will require a commitment from all concerned constituencies to work together to change the larger systems — employment training, social services, company hiring practices, and local and state policies — that directly or indirectly prevent low-income people from finding good jobs or taking advantage of promising opportunities.

COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS must be provided with adequate financial support, technical assistance, networking opportunities, and other resources that enable them to design more effective, accountable, and outcomes-oriented programs. The majority of job creation and workforce development programs undertaken by community-based organizations have been underfunded and are thus constrained by the day-to-day frustrations of finding financial resources. Specifically, funding has been time-limited or piecemeal due to an unwillingness among funders to devote the considerable resources needed to change labor markets in ways that will benefit low-income citizens. Community-based organizations working on workforce development issues also need greater flexibility so that they can focus attention on the aspects of their programs that are performing well and can, ultimately, enhance their accountability.

Specific Insights Gained

In addition to these general lessons are more specific insights that have surfaced as the *Jobs Initiative* reaches its midpoint:

◆ EMPLOYERS' participation in workforce development efforts is largely fueled by self-interest, due to an unprecedented shortage of entry-level and skilled workers, the high cost of employee turnover, and the increasing number of baby boom retirements. Efforts to encourage employers to hire from diverse workforce pools must, therefore, appeal to employers' bottom line.

◆ ENGAGING employers is not easy and often requires liaisons or brokers who know the industry and can promote workforce development programs. At this point, successful engagement happens only with employers who are open to considering changes in their hiring practices, their workplace culture, and the way they train managers. In addition, employers should understand the challenges low-income, entry-level workers frequently face, including a lack of housing, and difficulty finding child care and transportation.

◆ EMPLOYER-DRIVEN and relatively short-term job training that stresses "soft skills" and that provides financial and social service supports for low-income enrollees can help contribute to lower dropout and higher retention rates.

◆ UP-FRONT screening and assessment to better match potential employers and employees helps lead to better placement. Such screening, however, can sometimes lead to "creaming" the best candidates, leaving individuals who may be harder to employ with no alternative forms of assistance.

◆ NEWLY placed enrollees must be closely monitored and provided with support and follow-up services — including support groups, telephone calls and meetings, as well as financial, housing and child-care assistance — to help ensure that they stay on the job.

◆ TRAINING and jobs should be located near public transportation since a majority of low-income enrollees in these programs rely on it.

◆ MORE flexible public financing is needed to help support participants in these kinds of programs. Especially needed are funds that can be allocated quickly and efficiently, so that organizations can respond to employers' training and hiring needs in a more timely way.

◆ CHANGES in regional or local economic or political climates can have a tremendous impact on the direction and focus of workforce development efforts and should be factored into all planning and program design efforts.

◆ PERFORMANCE- or outcomes-based contracting with nonprofit agencies responsible for recruitment, placement, or follow-up services can be an incentive to meet programmatic goals. It can also, however, lead to "creaming" and cash flow problems among contracting agencies.

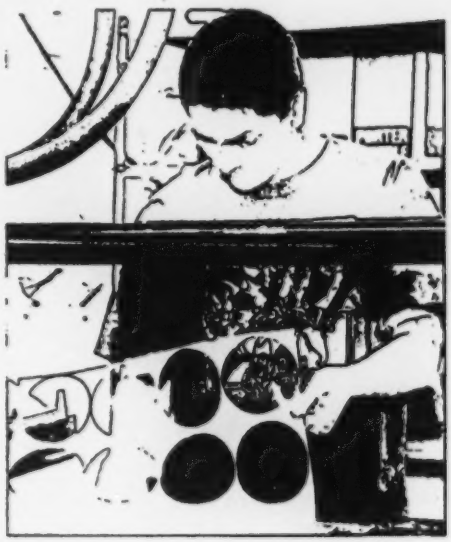
◆ PRACTITIONERS must learn "cultural competence" and develop innovative strategies for integrating issues of race and ethnicity in their own projects as well as in all facets of workforce development, including recruitment, job placement, worker retention and advancement, and employer relations.

Some of these lessons learned are new; others are not. What is clear is that, together, they form a blueprint for implementing more effective workforce development efforts. With greater attention to these and other lessons gleaned through the *Jobs Initiative*, policymakers, community leaders and others will have the tools to engage in more thoughtful and informed debate about job-related issues, and, most important, to develop more responsive and effective workforce development policies and programs for the future.

Site Reports

DENVER:

Innovative Products to Encourage Retention



As director of employee relations and recruitment for a Denver-based company, Pete Whittle likes to open his management training sessions with provocative questions that prompt supervisors to think about workplace issues from employees' points of view. He might ask, for example, whether managers would wear bathing suits to work. "That question may seem absurd to people who have worked for years," he says, "but for people who've never had a job, it may not be so obvious as to what is appropriate workplace dress or behavior."

Helping managers gain insight into the struggles and perspectives of entry-level workers from diverse backgrounds can mitigate the potential for misunderstanding that contributes to high turnover, dropout, or poor job performance, according to Carol Hedges, director of the Denver Workforce Initiative (DWI), which has worked with Whittle's company and others throughout the region. An example is the chronically late entry-level employee whose inability to find day care or public transportation may prevent him or her from getting to work on time. If managers are unaware of these difficulties they are likely to assume the worst and penalize the employee, rather than talking to and working it out with him or her.

Encouraging employers and employees to "work it out" is exactly what DWI does through innovative training curricula it has developed for both groups. The curricula are among the several products DWI is making available to select industries and companies across the state. *Workin' It Out** is a workplace-based curriculum that helps entry-level workers understand the differences between work and home cultures and provides them with training in the cognitive and problem-solving skills that are essential to long-term, sustainable employment. Offering this kind of training to new employees who may not have much work experience is extremely important to employers, who, says Hedges, "tell us that it's easier to teach job skills to people after they're hired than to ensure that new workers are ready to work."

After testing the curriculum with entry-level workers, DWI realized that successful retention was a two-way street and that the supervisors of these workers needed training as well. "We could successfully train entry-level workers in soft skills," Hedges says, "but if supervisors don't understand or support them when they come to the workplace, those efforts will be moot." DWI's *Managing to Work It Out* program gives employers alternative strategies for resolving conflict and understanding the different perspectives employees bring to the workplace. "We don't ask employers to change the rules, but rather, to change the culture in a way that facilitates worker retention," Hedges says.

* *Workin' It Out, Managing to Work It Out, Learnin' to Work It Out,* and *Beginning to Work It Out* are all copyrighted curricula of the Denver Workforce Initiative.

Recruiting and retaining entry-level workers is a growing problem for many employers in the area, says Whittle, whose company incorporated both curricula into its operations a year and a half ago. "You simply don't get this kind of training in management school," he notes, "and it's critical if you want to keep employees on the job." To date, about 75 of the company's managers have participated, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Whittle's company also has trained the trainers to offer the workshops at other sites, where "these folks go out on to the floors of our facilities and train employees and managers," Whittle says.

Potential employers are recruited with the help of industry managers — individuals with experience in and knowledge about the industry sectors DWI has targeted — who also help identify companies most in need of entry-level workers. All companies participating in the initiative must provide jobs that pay at least $7 per hour, offer health benefits, and be located a reasonable, commutable distance from inner-city workers. Entry-level workers are recruited through community coaches, some of whom are residents living in communities where jobs are needed.

Using feedback from coaches, employers, and employees, DWI is continuously refining its products to better serve its customers and has added two additional programs to its roster: *Learnin' to Work It Out*, a curriculum for potential employees before they enter the workplace, and *Beginning to Work It Out*, training targeted to younger workers who have just obtained their first jobs. DWI is also developing as a portable product a series of case studies that can be used to explore alternative solutions to workplace problems.

We don't ask employers to change the rules, but rather, to change the culture in a way that facilitates worker retention.

Marketing all its products to a wider audience is DWI's current and future challenge because many employers need to be educated about the importance of retention and what it costs to lose workers. Another challenge is making the training more accessible to workers, who must take time off the floor to participate. DWI is currently exploring the possibility of having employers subsidize part of the training so that participants will not have to worry about missing work time. The project also continues to grapple with racism on the part of some employers and apathy on the part of some workers. "These are difficult issues," a staff person notes, "because there are often huge culture gaps."

Organizationally, DWI is working to upgrade its data collection systems so that it can become more rigorous in measuring progress, which is steadily increasing. To date, about 300 entry-level workers and 450 managers have taken part in *Workin' It Out* and *Managing to Work It Out*, respectively. In addition, 24 trainers and 270 supervisors have been trained to offer the course. Approximately 63 percent of entry-level workers who were placed in jobs have stayed employed for three months — a figure DWI staff would like to see increase substantially over the next four years.

In the meantime, the word is getting out, says Hedges, that DWI knows the businesses and sources of entry-level workers, and "people are now coming to us." Ask Whittle whether *Workin' It Out* has helped his employees stay on the job, and he'll tell you about the first class he taught. Of the twelve people who came initially, seven completed the program. "Those seven people are still with the company," he notes. "The other five have left."

MILWAUKEE:

Employer-Linked Training That Works

When Wisconsin officials made a decision five years ago to support the development of programs that would help low-income people move into jobs in the printing industry — one of the state's largest — they knew whom to contact. A printer by trade, Lauren Baker is the director of the Milwaukee Graphic Arts Institute (MGAI), a 27-year-old training program that provides advanced training to employees working in an industry that has rapidly become more computerized and high-tech. Baker responded by opening MGAI's doors to people with no printing experience and in just three years trained 120 new enrollees, 70 percent of whom were placed in printing jobs providing higher-than-average wages.

In 1997, word of the program's success reached the Milwaukee Jobs Initiative (MJI), a multifaceted effort to address the lack of connections between impoverished central-city neighborhoods and family-supporting employment. MJI offered to help Baker systematize and create an infrastructure that would expand the program's outreach and training capacity. "As a program with deep connections to an industry in need of workers, we saw MGAI as a program that could provide enrollees with real-world exposure to what they'd experience in the workplace," says MJI Director Steve Holt.

The advent of Wisconsin Works (W2), the state's response to welfare reform legislation requiring work-linked public assistance, however, presented unforeseen challenges. A drop in caseloads following W2 led to a surplus of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars, which were being allocated to programs unable to train entry-level workers in ways that matched what employers said they needed. In addition, the funding process presented difficulties. MGAI had been receiving Jobs Training Partnership Act (JTPA) support, which required an up-front employer commitment to hiring people into jobs. Training could not begin until the Private Industry Council (PIC) reviewed and approved proposals from agencies requesting JTPA funds — a process that sometimes took up to nine months. "If employers came to me and said, 'I need to hire ten people,' " Baker recalls, "I'd have to say, 'Well, can you wait nine months?' "

We saw MGAI as a program that could provide enrollees with real-world exposure to what they'd experience in the workplace.

With help from MJI, Baker and her staff began to approach agencies receiving TANF grants and ask them to fund and help implement training programs for entry-level workers. Several agreed, allowing MGAI to recruit more broadly, provide customized training, and get people into jobs quickly — a track record that gave MGAI the leverage to approach new industries and employers. MGAI also asked the PIC to consider streamlining its funding process to be more timely and responsive. "We said we could do a better job than the current system, and they agreed to try us out. They said, 'You bring us the employer commitments, and we'll fund them,' " Program Manager Renee Zakhar recalls. The PIC not only agreed, but now uses MGAI's proposal as a model for other sectors and agencies.

MGAI also hired an employment broker, Brenda Campbell, who has helped increase the project's visibility. During her first three months on the job, Campbell made contact with 370 of the 435 printing companies in Milwaukee and now makes it her goal to identify and cultivate at least two new potential employers per month. With Zakhar, she carefully screens employers to ensure they are able to offer low-income workers decent, family-supporting jobs with career advancement opportunities. Once MGAI has secured a company's commitment, staff recruit potential workers and design customized training for employers, who are invited to help shape the curriculum. Campbell and Zakhar also challenge employers to think about changes they could make in their work environments, specifically, raising their entry-level wage, offering greater scheduling flexibility, and hiring more women and minorities. Above all, staff make sure that there is buy-in to this process at all levels of the company.

An important part of the program is the on-site visits students make to companies where they eventually will be employed. Although these visits have been a part of the program since its inception, one company asked that they be extended to a full eight-hour day after an initial group of graduates began dropping out because they were overwhelmed by the workplace environment. According to Anna Cathey, a training coordinator for a large manufacturing company, this extended orientation "really makes a difference." In addition to helping acclimate the employee to the company, Cathey and her colleagues have the opportunity to assess candidates' readiness to work. To ensure the best fit between worker and employer, MGAI has tightened its employee assessment process, taking time to evaluate enrollees' work readiness; access to transportation, child care, or housing; and other factors contributing to job success or failure. Better assessment has resulted in better placement. Of the 49 students enrolled from February to October 1999, 92 percent completed the training, and 98 percent of graduates were placed in jobs.

Recruitment continues to be a challenge, however, because of the wide regional dispersion of the referral agencies, many of which suffer from high turnover. To address this, MGAI staff continuously develop relationships with new people in those agencies and educate them about the program — a labor intensive process but one that "pays off because they get to know us better and send more appropriate referrals," Zakhar says. MGAI has also developed a program that allows multiple agencies to collaborate and fund training slots for a particular class, rather than having to rely on individual agencies that may serve only a small portion of MGAI's targeted population.

With MJI, MGAI is now planning for the establishment of the Milwaukee Area Graphic Industry Center (MAGIC), a one-stop integrated industry facility that will train incumbent and new workers in the latest equipment and technologies and that ultimately will connect printing employers with the future workforce. By streamlining the job-training and placement process, MAGIC will change the way an entire industry recruits and trains workers. "We want to get to the point where the entire printing industry says, 'This is our training institute and where we go to get the best workers,'" Baker says.

NEW ORLEANS:

Forging Relationships That Rebuild Communities

"In New Orleans," says Darryl Burrows, director of the New Orleans Jobs Initiative (NOJI), "everything — business, banking, and industry — is driven by relationships. They're critical to getting things done." NOJI was built on strong relationships — and not just among the traditional power brokers. From its inception, NOJI has involved and encouraged the full participation of a wide range of stakeholders — low-income residents, community organizations, church groups, business leaders, foundations, and a local college — to work together and create a workforce development system that prepares public-housing and other low-income residents for family-sustaining jobs. "Until this initiative," says Linetta Gilbert, vice president of programs at the Greater New Orleans Foundation, which sponsored the planning meetings, "we'd never had these kinds of conversations around workforce development issues. It was unprecedented."

Convening diverse constituencies took time, but it was well worth it, according to Burrows. Today, public-housing tenants are sitting down and negotiating with bank presidents. Taking time to build these kinds of relationships "at the front end," says Burrows, "allowed NOJI to tap into extensive networks more easily once the project officially started." Now, he adds, "when we start a new part of the project, we don't have to look around for business or community leaders to help us. They're already involved."

In addition to its bottom-up orientation, several other factors distinguish NOJI from previous regional workforce development efforts. NOJI's goal is getting people out of poverty — not just getting them jobs — so it targets only employers in high-wage and growth industries. Employee referrals come from three community-based organizations — Citywide Tenants Group, an association of public-housing tenants, and two faith-based coalitions, All Congregations Together and the Jeremiah Group — that identify and recruit people living in and around two public-housing complexes.

Once recruited, enrollees receive technical skills training at a local community college, which, in turn, works closely with employers to design curricula to meet the latter's needs. This contributes to retention, says Burrows, because "when employers have confidence that they're

going to get the workers they need, they're more willing to be patient with entry-level people as they progress through the beginning weeks of the job."

A critical part of the process is NOJI's pre-employment or soft skills training, much of which focuses on teaching the new code of the workplace and ending the social isolation of NOJI participants. "Many inner-city residents aren't socialized to understand the difference between community and workplace codes. What has helped them survive in the community may not help them in the workplace, so we validate both and then help them discover how and when to apply each," says Burrows.

As it did in planning the overall initiative, NOJI used a participatory approach in designing the soft skills component of the program. It began by conducting a comprehensive, country-wide search of best practices, most of which, says one staff person, "were relatively unfocused lifestyle programs or based on the faulty assumption that low-income people lacked a work ethic." Few, if any, subscribed to sociologist William Julius Wilson's assertion that unemployment is the result of a changing inner city in which jobs, as well as the community institutions that prepare and socialize people for work, have disappeared. "That's what we believe and what we have found to be true in our community," says Burrows, whose organization played host to Wilson during his recent trip to New Orleans.

Self-discovery and dialogue are important parts of the learning process, as are developing strategies to cope with racism and sexism on the job.

NOJI convened several focus groups of public-housing residents, business leaders, and other stakeholders to suggest alternative job readiness training strategies. This led to NOJI being one of the first organizations to create a soft skills curriculum with the full participation of residents of targeted communities, whose input is reflected throughout the program. Recognizing, for example, that African-American residents may have biases about traditional educational programs, residents worked with NOJI to design curricula in a way that is less instructor based, and more focused on empowering individuals to share their experiences and perspectives. Self-discovery and dialogue are important parts of the learning process, as are developing strategies to cope with racism and sexism on the job. Representatives from the two faith-based coalitions facilitate the training, which allows for these kinds of difficult and important conversations to happen.

NOJI's unique approach has helped Burrows "convince more than one skeptical bureaucrat that it's not just another job-training program." Still, he admits that it is a constant challenge to break through the "work first" ethos that defines Louisiana's welfare reform efforts. "We'd like to see greater understanding of the importance of training first — and then work," Burrows states. "The only way to make people stay in jobs is to give them the skills they need to compete. When you make people work 35 hours and train them only five, you'll never get there."

NOJI also would like to see more available public funding allocated to helping community colleges and vocational schools become better equipped to train entry-level workers. Currently, NOJI is trying to convince the community college with which it contracts for technical skills training — the only one in the region — to reconsider its desire to become an increasingly academic institution. But preserving this institution's focus on vocational training is only the first step,

says Gilbert. "We need to convince policymakers that it's important to invest money at the community college and vocational level." NOJI, in fact, persuaded the community colleges to make a $65,000 investment that purchased state-of-the art machinery for its enrollees to use in training — something employers thought would never happen.

Meanwhile, growing numbers of New Orleans citizens believe that NOJI is making progress where other programs have fallen short, moving some of the city's most disadvantaged residents into jobs that offer substantial opportunities for advancement. Recently, NOJI took 20 students to Baton Rouge to tell the Louisiana Workforce Commission how NOJI is more effective than traditional job-training programs. "It was a great moment for the group and the commission," Burrows recalls. "Our students got to see the state legislature in action, and the commission got to see that our program really is different. It was a moment when the world paused and looked at the people who really mattered."

PHILADELPHIA:

Stipends for Students

For years, the Philadelphia-based Penn Emblem Company was the world's largest manufacturer of embroidered and screen-printed emblems for uniform rental services and industrial laundries. A shrinking workforce capable of operating and maintaining its equipment, however, forced the company to move and take 250 jobs out of Pennsylvania.

Today, the rusted, abandoned, and graffiti-scarred shell that once housed Penn Emblem has become home to Philadelphia Area Accelerated Manufacturing Education (PhAME). A public/private partnership that is part of the Philadelphia Jobs Initiative, PhAME trains residents to operate machinery so that they will qualify for thousands of skilled factory jobs in a five-county region facing a severe workforce shortage. "It's a myth that manufacturing jobs went away," says Charlie Moore, a former business owner who managed PhAME's planning process and served as the group's first executive director. "The manufacturing sector is alive and well. It just didn't do a great job of explaining to people that it offers good-paying and family-supporting jobs."

Prior to their enrollment in PhAME, most students made less than $8 per hour; now, graduates make, on average, $14.52 per hour plus benefits. "Not only do students get good jobs, but they're on career ladders," says Moore.

PhAME emerged out of local manufacturers' growing frustration over substandard vocational education and job-training programs that either were not adequately preparing people for manufacturing jobs or were preparing them for jobs that did not exist. One of those manufacturers, Crown Cork and Seal Company, led the effort to establish PhAME, along with other civic and nonprofit organizations — Delaware Valley Industrial Resource Center, Ogontz Avenue Revitalization Corporation, Community College of Philadelphia, and Lehigh University — that were interested in matching low-income workers with jobs.

Partners met regularly to design a 61-week, site-based training program that combines classroom and factory skills education, as well as job survival or work readiness training. Students are expected to arrive on time for class, dress and conduct themselves in a businesslike manner, and remain drug-free throughout the program. All curricula are designed and updated in collaboration with industrial partners to ensure they are up-to-date and appropriate.

PhAME's relatively lengthy training period made it difficult, at first, to recruit would-be participants, many of whom could not afford to attend a 61-week program with no income. In 1997, PhAME began providing enrollees with stipends that helped cover trainees' rent, child care, and

other bills, thus keeping them in the program. "The impact of these funds was immediate and enormous," recalls Ceci Schickel, head of Philadelphia Interfaith Action (PIA), a broad-based coalition of 40-plus congregations that led an advocacy campaign to secure $2 million in state job-training grants for PhAME. "Until that point, PhAME had been unable to fill 60-slot classes. After the stipends became available, PhAME got 250 candidates."

By May 1999, these funds had begun to dwindle, prompting another PIA-led campaign. Mobilizing allies in the private sector and religious communities, PIA met with every key member of the state legislature, as well as congressional staff, to encourage them to commit more funds to the program. Their tenacity led to an agreement from the state legislature to commit an additional $5 million for PhAME's stipends and operations.

Organizers admit this is only a temporary solution and that PhAME's reliance on stipends has made it a relatively expensive program to operate and sustain. To that end, PhAME has begun to explore alternative funding strategies, including pursuing policy changes that will allow this type of training program to receive state-subsidized education funds. PhAME is also considering program changes that will allow trainees to step out at certain phases of the training and still have the skills to apply for good manufacturing jobs — an option included in their original strategic plan that became moot with the advent of stipends.

After the stipends became available, PhAME got 250 candidates.

PhAME's demanding curriculum also has made it difficult for the program to recruit from the low-income population it initially targeted. Specifically, administrators concede that a healthy economy has limited the number of people who are interested in investing so much time in this kind of training. Moreover, those who are interested often are not capable of meeting the academic requirements of the program, which call for considerable math aptitude.

As a result, PhAME has had to "reach out further," says Moore. Recently, the program embarked on a sophisticated marketing campaign that presents a more upbeat picture of PhAME, as well as of the manufacturing industry. Ads touting that PhAME graduates earn more than $25,000 per year plus benefits have been mailed to 12,000 homes near PhAME's site and placed in numerous community and weekly newspapers.

A senior staff person admits that, although this campaign will help increase recruitment, it does not necessarily ensure that interested individuals will be from targeted low-income communities. That is why system changes are so important, says a PhAME staff member, especially "broader support of long-term skills training, which is critical to sustained job success." This is a particularly important message to impart in a "work first" state like Pennsylvania, says Moore. Currently, PhAME is convening a consortium of manufacturing trade organizations to work with policy-makers in developing a plan to standardize training requirements and "impress upon them the importance of linking every entitlement program with vocational education that will not just help people get jobs, but get good jobs with advancement opportunities — the ones that help move people out of the welfare system for good." PhAME also works closely with the Jobs Policy Network, a broad-based coalition organized by the Philadelphia Jobs Initiative, that advocates for workforce development policies.

ST. LOUIS:

Job Training That Strengthens Communities

It doesn't take long for inner-city residents enrolled in the St. Louis Jobs Initiative (SLJI) WorkLink program to realize that they are participating in something different from the standard job-training programs many have been through already. "The majority of job readiness programs just teach people how to get a job. We go beyond that and help them become productive and stabilizing forces in their community," says WorkLink's Carolyn Seward.

WorkLink is a joint effort between St. Louis Community College and Better Family Life (BFL), a nonprofit organization that provides cultural, economic, and educational programs that help advance the development of African-American families. The collaboration grew from the college's efforts to develop educational programs to help Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients move rapidly into jobs. Although implementing on-campus programs was relatively easy for the institution, designing educational programs that would reach beyond the college walls and into one of the most depressed areas of the city was more of a challenge. "We quickly saw that it was critical to forge a relationship with a community-based organization with deep links to the targeted community, as well as the credibility, name recognition, and track record needed to make a difference," says Jack Quigley of St. Louis Community College.

That organization was BFL, which recruits potential workers and provides long-term support and follow-up to entry-level workers once they are placed in jobs. BFL also provides job readiness training, which organizers see as the key to the program's success. Initially modeled after the much-publicized STRIVE program in New York City, BFL's four-week training emphasizes interviewing skills, dress codes, communication strategies, the rules of workplace culture, and other areas that are important factors in finding and retaining good jobs for entry-level workers.

The program is intense and demanding: Enrollees are expected to be in class from 8 to 5 every weekday, dress appropriately, address the instructors respectfully, and generally behave as they would in the workplace. The businesslike atmosphere of WorkLink's training facility and environment reinforces what is learned through the program. In addition, nearly 60 percent of WorkLink's staff is from the business sector, bringing real-world insights and experiences into the learning process.

WorkLink also offers extensive support services — from making sure that all recently placed workers get to work on time to giving them a call periodically — for up to two years after placement. Once enrollees have stayed in a job for six months, they are asked to join WorkLink's alumni network, speak at graduations, and become BFL members. As such, they are expected to make a commitment to

community service, take their children to after-school programs, abstain from drug use, and regularly attend neighborhood meetings. "Essentially, when people come to WorkLink, they're not only trained in how to get a job, get to work on time, and obey the rules, they're asked to become active members of their community. This is what changes lives," says Seward.

In just one year of operation, more than 150 WorkLink graduates have found full-time employment. Of these graduates, one-quarter either have been promoted or have changed jobs, all for higher wages than their original position paid. Employers also are getting involved by attending WorkLink's graduation ceremonies and holding job fairs at the site. "Among employers, there's confidence that when people leave WorkLink, they're prepared for work," says SLJI Director Tom Rhodenbaugh.

WorkLink staff are especially proud of their success in placing almost equal numbers of men and women in jobs. Women often make up the majority of TANF recipients and thus tend to be over represented in such programs. Having a flexible and alternative funding source (such as the Casey Foundation) to supplement public funding also helps to level the field, says Rhodenbaugh. WorkLink also has several men on its staff, who can attract more male candidates to the program and change the dynamics of training.

The majority of job readiness programs just teach people how to get a job. We go beyond that.

These and other innovations have caught the attention of organizations engaged in similar efforts. STRIVE is now consulting with WorkLink to incorporate its follow-up services into the STRIVE program. There are also plans to replicate the program in other low-income communities, both inside and outside Missouri.

Staff are now just beginning to work toward changing the larger systems that prohibit low-income people from landing solid employment, especially a lack of access to education. "Post-employment education is a huge issue," says Quigley. "It's very hard for most adults to work, use public transportation, and take care of family responsibilities, and have energy or resources left for education or training. Even those who are able to devote the time often face the additional barriers of exorbitant tuition or classes that are scheduled during work time. Moreover, most employers are still unaware of the importance of education or perceive it as too expensive."

WorkLink is just beginning to explore with employers the possibility of giving leave time to entry-level workers to attend training or classes, placing college instructors in the workplace to accommodate workers' schedules, or offering apprenticeships to entry-level workers. Apprenticed employees would be paid a slightly lower wage than skilled workers receive — a savings the company would then use to support the workers' educational expenses.

Another change staff would like to see is a shift in the way success is measured for people enrolled in these kinds of programs. Report forms, they say, should include questions about enrollees' involvement in their churches or schools, volunteer work, and other factors rarely evaluated or measured. Most important, says Rhodenbaugh, success needs to be measured in terms of permanent job placement. "Placing people in jobs isn't success to us," he says. "Placing people in the labor market and keeping them there is."

SEATTLE:

Creating a Citywide and Comprehensive Workforce Development System

Like many cities experiencing an economic boom, Seattle needs skilled entry-level workers at a time when low-income residents need jobs. Unlike most cities, however, Seattle, through the Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI), is implementing systemwide change that tries to link the two.

SJI's goal is fourfold: To more effectively and efficiently place, retain, and advance low-income residents, including those trying to leave welfare, in living-wage jobs; to provide residents with access to job training that is integrated with human services; to supply qualified workers to industries that need them; and to improve the overall workforce development system. Originally proposed by the city's Office of Economic Development, SJI involved businesses, colleges, labor unions, foundations, and nonprofit agencies up front in planning the comprehensive cross-sector initiative. Site staff also conducted labor market analyses to identify sectors able to offer living-wage jobs, provide benefits, and offer advancement opportunities. Local community colleges were selected to provide classroom-based technical skills training. Community-based social service organizations also were recruited to offer case management, job readiness training, and provide support services.

SJI's holistic design reflects a commitment to putting the client's needs at the forefront because, says one staff person, "If someone doesn't have a place to sleep or is concerned about their next meal, they're not going to do well in training and they're certainly not going to last in a job." To that end, SJI offers connections to transitional housing, provides food and clothing assistance, negotiates group rates with area child care providers, and operates a Career Investment Fund that provides financial assistance.

In two years, SJI has placed more than 1,600 people into jobs paying an average of $9.47 per hour. More than 393 graduates have reported wage increases since initial placement, and they now earn an average of $10.68 per hour. As of December 1999, 75 percent of all placed graduates had been on the job for six months. Sixty-six percent of people coming into the program earned less than $9,000 per year; after being placed in jobs, they make, on average, $19,700 annually.

These accomplishments were largely due to SJI's ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Within months of start-up, for example, SJI staff realized that its initial operational model — which separated program management and oversight of the 11 community-based organizations with which SJI contracts — hindered coordination and communication among the various players. To address these problems, SJI merged the two functions and created sector teams to facilitate better communication among various program staff involved in each sector.

If someone doesn't have a place to sleep or is concerned about their next meal, they're not going to do well in training and they're certainly not going to last in a job.

SJI's office occupations team has achieved some of the highest retention rates among all the Casey sites: at least 65 percent of SJI's office occupations graduates are still working after one year. The staff attributes this trend to the active participation and collaboration of team members, especially the sector manager and the employment broker. Working together, Sector Team Manager Anne Keeney, Broker Kathy Kelly, and other team members customize all training curricula to match employers' needs. They also follow up with graduates after placement, through regular phone contact and a support group that meets quarterly. Additional post-placement computer training is available through regular Saturday classes staffed by Microsoft volunteers. New workers are invited to speak at SJI graduation ceremonies, "which gives students a sense of continuity and of where their predecessors have gone," says an SJI staff person.

An important part of the job, says Kelly, is "getting employers to think differently about how they hire people. Too many companies still use hiring criteria that only look at people's work experience or how they come across on paper." Kelly encourages employers to consider hiring SJI graduates by selling to their bottom line. "I point out that our people may have gaps in their work histories, but they have completed this rigorous, customized training and have the skills employers say they need. I show employers their test scores. I tell them we provide the job readiness training that most employers say they wish all entry-level employees had. And I remind them that we have a two-year retention program for our people that gives them a safety net if they get into trouble."

That argument was enough to convince Renee Flotlin, a senior recruiter with Washington Mutual, one of the region's largest banks, to hire SJI graduates. "Unlike people we had hired off the streets or through ads," Flotlin recalls, "we had proof that SJI students had the training they needed for the job because we actually were able to see the results of their test scores." The company has been so pleased with the graduates they have hired through the program, they have agreed to sponsor several paid internships, which Flotlin says have been very successful. "I've been recruiting in this area for a long time," she notes, "and I've seen people we've hired externally come and go. I haven't seen the SJI people going. They come ready to work and with a great attitude."

SJI has had its share of challenges, however. Welfare reform legislation, for example, reduced caseloads more quickly than originally anticipated and has forced SJI to be more aggressive in its recruitment efforts. Moreover, state programs that emphasize rapid placement (into any job) have made it more difficult for organizations emphasizing job training and living-wage jobs to secure public funding. SJI, therefore, is working with the Seattle King County Workforce Development Council — a new entity made up of representatives from the local investment board, community colleges, labor unions, businesses, community-based organizations, and funders — that is charged with disbursing Workforce Investment Act funds. The two organizations are trying to identify ways of collaborating to better serve low-income residents and employers who need entry-level workers.

SJI also has had to make changes in its employer outreach efforts because of significant layoffs in the aerospace industry (one of SJI's originally targeted sectors), which reduced the number of jobs available in the region. That forced SJI to go back to the drawing board and reevaluate targeted sectors. "This takes a lot of time," one staff person emphasized, "because it involves conducting more thorough market analyses that will better predict future economic opportunities."

In the meantime, the staff has begun to approach individual companies with large hiring needs, rather than waiting for them to come to SJI. Recently, for example, SJI staff met with the chief executive officer of a new hotel being built in Seattle to encourage him to hire SJI workers. The director agreed, SJI devised customized training, and 35 new jobs resulted. The group has also secured an agreement from the city to ask any new businesses desiring building contracts to consider signing a voluntary agreement to hire SJI graduates.

SJI's dual-customer focus helped seal the deal on this agreement, which matches employers with family-supporting jobs and job seekers who have a retention support network. According to Communications Director Andrea Bowers, "Employees see that we've created an environment that says their success is valued and that we have a whole group of people who celebrate their success. Employers see that when they give their time they get something back. It's a win-win all around."

Lessons Learned

DESPITE A BOOMING ECONOMY, a powerful disconnect exists that threatens the future economic viability of entire cities, including those that are part of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Jobs Initiative.* Employers are unable to fill growing numbers of entry-level jobs because they cannot find employees who meet their requirements and expectations. Underemployed and unemployed individuals, many of whom are low income and living in the inner city, lack access to the kind of training and education that will prepare them for these jobs. Employers and would-be employees are hurt by public policies emphasizing "work first" or rapid attachment that focus solely on placing low-income people in jobs, with little regard for whether these jobs offer a living wage, benefits, or career advancement opportunities. The result is an inadequately trained workforce that is more likely to drop out of entry-level positions and an employer base that is increasingly suffering the expense and frustration of high employee turnover.

By developing innovative strategies that link employers able to provide family-supporting wages and career opportunities to low-income residents wanting jobs, the six sites that constitute the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Jobs Initiative* are helping to meet the demands of the modern workplace. Their experiences to date suggest that achieving this goal requires:

- THE ENGAGEMENT OF employers in workforce development at the beginning of the process and a view of them as collaborators in that process;
- AN UNDERSTANDING THAT worker retention and advancement in the labor market are as important as job placement and that employers and employees must be involved these efforts;
- STRATEGIES THAT ENCOURAGE buy-in among all affected stakeholders — low-income residents, employers, elected officials, community-based organizations, government agencies, and others — to work together toward broad systemic change; and
- AN ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE with adequate financial support, technical assistance, networking opportunities, and other resources needed to design, implement, and sustain effective and comprehensive programs that can be assessed and evaluated over time.

#1: EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

The experience of the six Casey Foundation *Jobs Initiative* sites indicates that when employers are integrally involved in all aspects of workforce development — from worker recruitment to curriculum and training design to follow-up support and services — retention rates tend to be higher, employees are more satisfied, and companies get a more dedicated and better trained workforce.

Key lessons learned regarding employer engagement are:

◇ Many employers get involved in workforce development out of self-interest.

CONCERNS ABOUT THE high cost of employee turnover, labor shortages, and increasing numbers of baby boom retirements are incentives for growing numbers of employers to get involved in workforce development efforts. "Employers are now facing a shortage of entry-level workers, who are no longer seen as easily replaced widgets. It is going to be too expensive for employers to replace them, so they have little choice but to reach down and train people they've previously overlooked," a program director notes. A human resources manager at a medium-sized company knows this from experience: "My own attempts at hiring entry-level workers through traditional avenues were unsuccessful, so we figured we had nothing to lose by trying something different. Our entire industry is dying to find and keep skilled entry-level workers who need jobs."

Given these circumstances, it is critical to appeal to employers' bottom line when recruiting them for participation in workforce development programs. It is also helpful to ask employers to think creatively about hiring — redefining entry-level requirements and considering diverse labor pools, for example — which not only helps entry-level workers find and keep jobs, but also assures employers that they will get the labor pool they need. Honesty also appeals to employers, says a company representative, "We appreciated that the project broker was up front with us about the deficits some of the enrollees had and then told us how her program was trying to overcome these. It made us more receptive to the program."

◇ Engaging employers requires attention to relationship building.

MANY SITE STAFF people stressed the importance of developing relationships with potential employers able to offer family-supporting jobs with benefits and career advancement opportunities. Much of this work can be done through brokers with extensive experience in the industry, which is "critical to making the right connections and getting employers to listen to you," a site director notes.

Brokers also should know how to place people in jobs. As one program director says, "We once had as a broker a public relations person who had a lot of contacts in an industry we were targeting, but she didn't know how to match employees with jobs, so it didn't work."

Making telephone calls, setting up meetings, pitching potential employers, and building relationships with key individuals in targeted companies all takes enormous staff time, resources, and effort

— and it is often only the first step in the process. "Once we finally have a few employers interested in hiring our people," said one broker, "then we have to recruit potential employees, work on designing the right curricula, find financial resources to support the enrollees, and monitor graduates. Not to mention making sure the employers are happy once they've hired people!" The workload is so intensive, say some brokers, that they do not spend enough time exploring the range of employment options available and developing relationships with good companies that can be sustained over time.

Ongoing communication also is essential to keep employers engaged. One site broker and her colleagues, for example, meet regularly with employers to discuss what is happening with newly placed graduates and solicit employers' suggestions for changes in the program — "communication that has been very helpful and critical to the success of the effort," an employer asserts.

◆ Employer engagement must occur at all levels.

"YOU CAN'T JUST ask company presidents to get behind these kinds of efforts," advises one broker. "Buy-in has to happen at every level of the company. If the executive likes the program, but the human resource people don't, you'll have a disconnect that will have a negative impact on what you're trying to achieve." An employer agrees, "We got involved with the *Jobs Initiative* because one of our senior managers supported it. But he also let his managers know that was his view so it could have a trickle-down effect."

Supervisors and managers also must be educated about the program and then trained to work with diverse employees. Denver's *Managing to Work It Out* curriculum, for example, helps managers and supervisors learn how to communicate with entry-level employees from urban backgrounds so that misunderstandings that could lead to premature dismissal occur less frequently.

◆ Employers must be involved in designing job-training programs.

IT IS IMPORTANT to listen carefully to employers to determine what skills they need in entry-level workers and then involve those employers in designing training curricula that meet their needs. "Employers know best what kind of employees they want, so we listen to them," says a site director, "and then match our curriculum to that." Employers also should be invited to sit in on training and offer feedback that will help staff refine curricula. Involving employers this way has the added benefit of building trust in the program. "We're happy knowing that, through this program, we're going to get good employees who have knowledge and training that other entry-level workers probably don't have because we helped design the training," says one employer.

- Employers need to understand the challenges facing entry-level workers.

"People who've been disconnected from the labor force," says one site director, "tend to experience more personal crises that affect their ability to stay in the program." Employers sometimes do not realize that low-income and minority workers often grapple with finding adequate and affordable child care, using public transportation, paying bills, and other problems that can exacerbate the stress of starting a new job in an environment that may be entirely different from anything they have previously known. "People don't get to work because of basic things like they can't get day care. All employers see is that the employee isn't there so they fire people for being late or not showing up, when much of it is just a breakdown in communication. Employers need to know where employees are coming from," says one company representative.

- Employers should adjust their workplace culture to better support entry-level workers from diverse backgrounds.

These kinds of workforce development programs often work best with employers who are willing to entertain and implement ideas for changing their workplaces in ways that can help meet entry-level workers halfway — raising their minimum wage, offering flex-time, considering women and minorities in nontraditional jobs. According to Milwaukee Jobs Initiative's Renee Zakhar, sometimes just asking the right question is enough. "It never occurred to us," she says, "that you could just ask employers for a higher starting wage, but we did, and they agreed."

In other cases, the discussions may be more complex, especially when helping employers to confront the racial or gender biases that linger in industries with little exposure to people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Some sites offer diversity training for firms struggling with these issues. Others help employers discern whether biases are rooted in blatantly discriminatory attitudes or are simply the result of hiring policies that unintentionally keep low-income or minority workers out of jobs. Businesses, for example, may require high school diplomas, drivers' licenses, or the lack of a criminal record — criteria that may have little or nothing to do with how skilled or qualified the person is for the job. "We ask why they have those requirements," says a site director, "and then suggest that they consider relaxing them in favor of hiring people with the job skills they actually need. A lot of employers will say they never thought about that."

#2: EMPLOYEE RETENTION & ADVANCEMENT

Recruiting and placing workers is just the first step toward building stronger economies and workforces. Retaining and giving workers opportunities to advance in the labor force is equally, if not more, important, given the high cost of turnover, retraining, and job-training programs. Staying in and advancing on the job is not just the responsibility of the employee, however. Employers can and should play a critical role in this process, as the Casey Foundation sites have demonstrated.

Key lessons learned regarding employee retention and advancement are:

◇ Careful up-front screening and assessment to better match potential employers and employees are essential.

"BETTER SCREENING AND recruitment — of workers and employers," notes one broker, "and matching the two leads to better placement. Better placement often leads to better retention." The Milwaukee Jobs Initiative, for example, assesses candidates' attitudes toward work at the beginning of the recruitment process, to assess whether applicants will be good matches for employers. In Denver, screening tools that help community-based recruiters determine who is ready to work include questions such as, "Could you pass a drug test today?" and "Do you have child care?" Employers should be screened to determine their capacity to offer good jobs with benefits and a workplace culture receptive to low-income workers.

Screening sometimes can eliminate from consideration individuals who may be harder to employ. There is risk that only the best and brightest are recruited, which mitigates the intended purpose of workforce development programs focused on expanding the labor pool in low-income communities. Given employers' increasing desire for these kinds of assessments, staff will have to make difficult decisions about the type of and extent of screening they will conduct.

◇ Providing enrollees with technical skills and job readiness or soft skills training contributes to long-term job success.

MANY *Jobs Initiative* SITES incorporate soft skills training into their overall curricula, a comprehensive approach that growing numbers of employers say they value. "So many employers have told us that if we can do anything for them, it's to teach entry-level workers how to be job ready — how to dress, interview, comport oneself in the workplace, communicate, write a resume," one site director claims. Denver's *Workin' It Out* workplace-based curriculum, for example, trains all entry-level workers in discerning the difference between workplace and home culture and provides strategies for problem solving, conflict resolution, developing support systems, identifying home versus workplace values, and other issues. The New Orleans Jobs Initiative job readiness training educates participants about workplace attire, the importance of being on time, and handling conflict — "things employers have told us are harder to instill than the technical stuff," staff say.

While most sites use local community colleges to provide the hard or technical skills instruction, they contract with community-based agencies, faith-based networks, or other organizations that are attuned to the special needs and challenges of low-income, entry-level workers to conduct the soft skills training. In St. Louis, for example, the WorkLink program contracts with Better Family Life, an established African-American community-based organization, to provide soft skills training to students.

Although further testing is needed, several site staff agreed that soft skills training can help contribute to better retention. It can also help pique the interest of policymakers, says one director. "Bureaucrats tended to see us as just another job-training program," he says, "until we told them that we provided soft skills training. Then they started listening to us."

◇ Participants often need support services to ensure that they graduate from the program and land and hold good jobs.

"IN OUR PROGRAM," says a program director, "the client's needs are always at the forefront. If they don't have a place to sleep or are concerned about their next meal, they're not going to do well in training and they're certainly not going to stay on the job." The Seattle Jobs Initiative, for example, negotiates group rates for the services that low-income workers most often need, such as child care and transportation; has a Career Investment Fund that provides financial assistance; and operates a transitional housing program for enrollees. Staff also are available to go to court with students who owe fines or need driver's licenses.

Follow-up services with newly placed workers are particularly important, especially during the first weeks on the job. Many sites monitor graduates to assist in resolving any problems. WorkLink's retention specialists, for example, provide follow-up support to new graduates for two years after placement, and it sponsors an alumni network that meets regularly to assist them. Seattle uses case managers to check up on new workers and asks graduates to join retention support groups that give them the chance to share concerns and build networks. These kinds of post-placement supports can be powerful selling points with employers. According to one broker, "If I promise employers that our people will come to them with soft and hard skills training, and a safety net of supports behind them, they understand that this is a powerful combination that most job candidates don't have."

Tracking newly placed employees, however, can be labor intensive and time consuming, especially for organizations with limited budgets, small staff capacity, and little access to computer information systems that facilitate more efficient monitoring. Still, when organizations do invest in follow-up efforts, "they can help keep people in jobs," says one senior staff director.

◇ Job seekers must have opportunities to familiarize themselves with the work environment before beginning actual jobs.

SEVERAL SITES SAY that giving program enrollees the chance to visit the worksite beforehand can help contribute to higher retention rates. The Milwaukee Jobs Initiative, for example, requires its printing students to spend a day on-site in companies where they will eventually be employed to learn about the industry, see how it works, and acclimate to the overall environment. This not only eases anxieties students may feel, but also helps enhance employers' comfort with and commitment to

new hires. Another site is working with employers to create paid internships or apprenticeships that can give students opportunities to receive hands-on technical training and obtain solid work experience, which also can result in better placement.

◇ It is unclear whether outcomes- and performance-based payment and contracting encourage higher retention.

ALL SITES USE outcomes-based payment systems when contracting with community-based agencies that recruit, train, or provide support services to individuals enrolled in the program. Specifically, agencies are paid on an incremental basis that is heavily skewed toward retention. One site, for example, pays agencies $75 for every graduate hired. If that person stays on the job for 30 days, the agency receives an additional $75. Subsequent payments increase, depending on the length of time a graduate stays in the workforce, for one, three, and six months. Agencies receive the highest payments for graduates who remain in the labor market for one year or more.

Although some site staff say that this system contributes to better retention, others are doubtful, citing drawbacks. First, because some of the organizations with which sites contract are nonprofits operating on shoestring budgets and are unable to conduct recruitment or placement services in a way that meets payment requirements, they often suffer from cash flow problems. In some cases, this has led to community-based organizations consciously or unconsciously selecting program participants based on attributes they believe will lead to enrollees completing the training and being placed in jobs, rather than enrolling low-income residents who may be harder to employ and who, arguably, may need training more. Some contractors also lack the capacity to conduct thorough tracking, monitoring, and follow-up once new recruits are placed or are reluctant to admit that their efforts in this area are relatively weak.

Second, performance-based contracting does not necessarily ensure good performance; it merely ensures that monies are not being expended on bad performance. If unaccompanied by capacity-building assistance, even the best-designed workforce development projects with stringently designed performance measures will not only ultimately fail, but take a longer time to fail, since recruiting, training, placing, and monitoring clients is a lengthy process.

◆ Postemployment training must be available and supported.

BECAUSE MOST NEW entry-level workers have families to support, use public transportation, or face considerable life challenges, they have little time for further education and training that will help them advance in their careers. Also, most are unable to qualify for regular college courses, and those who are qualified frequently cannot access them because classes are usually held during work hours. One site, therefore, is asking community colleges to offer evening classes and encouraging employers to offer release time for new workers so they can attend training. Another is negotiating with companies to help support workplace-based training and education. "Employers," says one site director, "often don't see the value in training like this at first because they have to take workers off the line, but when you stress the return on investment they'll gain with more educated workers capable of taking on more responsibility, they often agree to do it."

#3: COLLABORATION

Linking large numbers of low-income people to family-supporting jobs with advancement opportunities requires broad systems change and buy-in from employers, elected officials, community-based organizations, schools, and others concerned about these issues.

Key lessons learned in encouraging broad-based collaboration toward systemic change are:

◇ Involve a wide variety of stakeholders in planning and designing job-training and workforce development programs.

ENGAGING EMPLOYERS, CIVIC leaders, policymakers, community college faculty, representatives from community-based organizations, low-income residents, and other stakeholders in the design and creation of new job-related initiatives contributes to better outcomes. As one program director notes, "No one sector can do this alone. It takes a wide variety of constituencies to do this kind of work — and in a way that gets results."

It is particularly important to engage the participation of widely respected and well-known civic, business, or church leaders, who can open doors, facilitate networking opportunities, fundraise, and advocate on behalf of the initiative. The New Orleans Jobs Initiative (NOJI), for example, encouraged the participation of the Metropolitan Area Committee — the city's "mothers and fathers" — and asked one of its members, a highly respected business leader, to serve as the project's chair. "We all knew that nothing would change," says a NOJI staff person, "unless this power base had an investment in the program." The Philadelphia Area Accelerated Manufacturing Education (PhAME) was able to launch its job-training program with a huge investment from one of the region's largest manufacturing companies, members of which also serve on its board.

Perhaps the most important constituency to involve (and one that is often overlooked) is the impact community, specifically, residents and organizations from low-income communities who are better able to identify needed programs or services. NOJI, for example, asked residents from targeted communities what they believed to be most helpful in job readiness training and then incorporated this feedback into its curriculum.

Many site representatives acknowledged that this kind of relationship building can take longer because of the different, and sometimes conflicting, interests each brings to the table, but that it is well worth the effort. In addition to the unique experience and insights each constituency can provide, most have ready-made networks that can be helpful to projects down the road. "We don't have to find people to help us identify potential enrollees or employers," says a NOJI staffer, "because we involved them from the get-go and they're now part of our effort." Convening various constituencies, some of which may have never had the chance to talk to one another, can also enhance cross-system communication and the potential for future collaboration.

◇ Partner with groups that know and understand the targeted communities.

MOST SITES CONTRACT with local community colleges to provide hard, or technical skills, training but use community-based organizations to recruit potential students, offer job readiness preparation, follow up with graduates, and provide support or social services. Denver, for example, trains community coaches, individuals who are well-known in their communities, to assist program staff in recruiting and supporting low-income workers. NOJI relies on two citywide faith-based coalitions and their networks to recruit and provide soft skills training to enrollees because they "know the people in their congregations and neighborhoods who are looking for jobs," says a staff person. WorkLink's partnership with Better Family Life, an African-American community and cultural organization, has been instrumental to its recruitment.

◇ Develop relationships with a wide range of agencies and contact them regularly to ensure appropriate and adequate referrals.

MANY OF THE community-based or social service agencies responsible for referring clients to job-training programs experience high levels of turnover; as a result, new employees may be unaware of innovative efforts that match workers to industries with available jobs. To address this gap, some sites, such as the Milwaukee Jobs Initiative, monitor referral agencies and, when turnover occurs, set up meetings with new staff to educate them about their program and its benefits.

◇ Involve community and industry leaders in advocacy for systems change.

"WHAT MOVED STIPENDS for PhAME," says a project leader, "was the political clout of major employers involved with the project and a widely respected and well-known interfaith coalition that advocated for them." PhAME is now trying to mobilize major manufacturing industry leaders to work with policymakers to develop programs and policies that will link all entitlement programs to better job training and will coordinate services. Several sites have staff or board members who serve on local or state task forces or commissions. In addition to providing sites with information about policy decisions or pending legislation, these liaisons also are challenging public officials to rethink the way in which they design workforce initiatives.

#4: BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Organizations engaged in workforce development efforts need to have adequate and sustained financial support and other resources that will help them develop, implement, and sustain more effective and comprehensive programs.

Key lessons learned regarding building organizational capacity are:

◆ A comprehensive data collection system is critical.

ORGANIZATIONS MUST HAVE sophisticated management information systems in place to collect and cull data for all areas in which programs are engaged — employee recruitment, placement, retention, and advancement; employer satisfaction; and other variables important to assessing progress, identifying problem areas, and demonstrating achievements. Empirical data can also be used to attract the attention of policymakers, researchers, and others interested in creating new programs or enhancing existing ones. "We underestimated the importance of getting good data," says one site director, "so we have prioritized and put more resources into developing a better tracking system and then hired a skilled computer person to monitor it." Another site has begun planning to implement a web-based data collection process that allows its referral or training agencies and contractors to enter data directly into the system, rather than using handwritten forms that have to be transcribed and entered into a database.

◆ Programs should have staff with diverse backgrounds.

SIXTY PERCENT OF WorkLink's staff come from the business community and 40 percent from the social service sector — a mix that improves the program's ability to work with a variety of constituencies. Recognizing that most welfare-to-work programs and agencies are overloaded with women, both as clients and employees, WorkLink also tries to balance the male/female staff ratio. This helps to attract more male recruits and also changes the dynamic of training, as well as the types of job placements WorkLink brokers.

It is also important to hire multi-skilled staff who are willing to engage in a variety of tasks, including those not necessarily associated with a formal job description. This not only maximizes organizations' ability to achieve their goals more efficiently, it also helps generate greater understanding among staff as to the responsibilities of their co-workers. As one staff person advises, "Everybody should be a case manager, able to see all aspects of the program."

◆ Organizations need adequate time to plan and then implement.

PROGRAMS NEED ADEQUATE time for planning before they shift into implementation mode. "We moved from virtually nothing to full operation in about a year," one program director says, "which was very little time." In addition, projects need to design and operate from realistic business plans that start slowly and emphasize incremental growth. "We've only been in full operation for about

two years," says one director. "A two-year-old barely knows how to walk. With more time, we'll know exactly how successful we've been. You just can't rush it."

◇ Programs and models must allow for changes in the economic or political climate and develop contingency plans to address them.

IN SEATTLE, a large employer representing a sector originally targeted by the Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI) pulled up stakes and moved elsewhere. At the same time, the high-tech industry began to grow to an unanticipated degree. As a result, SJI organizers are now reworking their program in ways that will adapt to these shifts. "Programs need more flexibility to plan for workforce changes," one organizer says. "Simply counting the number of placements sometimes fails to take into account environmental factors that affect programs' ability to recruit and place people in jobs. What's more important is the program's ability to adapt in the face of challenges. Assessing new labor markets, contacting those employers, designing new curricula — all that takes time." Programs must also be able to anticipate changes more readily. The Milwaukee Jobs Initiative, for example, is constantly looking toward the next place from which they can recruit, which employers will be hiring, and where the new funding sources will be because they can't assume that anything will be the same six months hence.

◆ Organizations should have access to adequate and long-term financial support, technical assistance, and networking opportunities.

FUNDRAISING IS A constant challenge for some programs, especially those based in regions with few private industries or philanthropies, and it takes time away from program implementation. Having a sustained source of support helps leverage interest among other funders and provides a safety net for the organization. Ongoing technical assistance — fundraising, board development, cultural competency training, leadership development, and computer systems management — is also needed and welcomed by sites. Program staff members should have opportunities to learn from similar organizations through regular meetings that give them opportunities to discuss and explore strategies, including what works and what doesn't.

Conclusion

At its midpoint, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Jobs Initiative* is demonstrating how new approaches that differ from generally accepted workforce development practices can achieve results. Specifically, sectoral strategies can help change regional labor markets in ways that better serve low-income job seekers, especially in finding and keeping good jobs with career opportunities.

Although preliminary, these results have ramifications for future workforce development efforts at both the programmatic and policymaking levels. First, the experience of the *Jobs Initiative* sites suggests that the most effective programs will involve a wide variety of stakeholders, including employers. They will also focus on job retention and advancement and incorporate management information systems and outcomes-based evaluation.

Second, because the *Jobs Initiative* comes at a unique period of significant economic expansion and the implementation of welfare reform legislation, it is demonstrating how groups once viewed as disparate — former welfare recipients, low-wage workers, and laid-off workers — are remarkably similar in the issues they must confront. Thus, the insights and experiences of the *Jobs Initiative* sites may be increasingly applicable to an expanding swath of Americans in need of family-sustaining jobs.

Ensuring that these jobs are available requires substantial system reform, which has been the goal of the *Jobs Initiative* since its inception. This is based on the recognition that real and lasting change comes only when the larger systems, including public policies, function in ways that promote low-income people's access to better jobs, as well as to housing, child care, education, and other factors that affect that access.

As the six sites prepare to move from the operational phase, they will use the lessons they have learned thus far as a foundation for implementing broader systemic change. Although they differ in their strategies for reaching this goal — for example, public policy reform in Philadelphia, streamlined citywide systems in Seattle, and community mobilization and advocacy in New Orleans — the sites all will be working to determine whether the results they have achieved thus far can be scaled up to a higher level and meaningful change enacted.

What might such change look like? Based on their experience to date, site staff are in striking agreement about the kinds of systemic and policy changes needed to develop and implement effective workforce development efforts in low-income neighborhoods.

FIRST, job-related policies should be linked to adequate job training, rather than stressing work first, as is the case in many states implementing welfare reform legislation. Under the latter, low-income people tend to be placed in dead-end, low-paying jobs with little hope for advancement, rather than trained in the skills local employers say they want for higher-paying and available entry-level jobs.

SECOND, work first mandates should be loosened so that recruitment is less tied to funding sources. In several areas of the country, growing numbers of people are being forced off of public assistance because of welfare reform. Emerging is a new population of working poor, unable to access job-training programs targeted primarily toward moving individuals out of the welfare system. States must find ways to support this constituency, many members of which are holding low-paying, part-time jobs and who might be excellent candidates for publicly subsidized job-training programs but are prohibited from enrolling because of narrow funding restrictions.

THIRD, low-income individuals need financial assistance to ensure that they complete job-training programs, especially longer-term training or programs that require full-time attendance. That will require new or expanded public funding streams, as well as alternative sources of support, including company scholarships, revolving loan funds, and internships. These funds also must be more flexible so that organizations able to provide employer-tailored skills training (including soft skills), or that have hiring commitments from employers, can access support in a timely way.

FINALLY, job-related policies and programs must be linked with support and social services that bolster the likelihood of low-income workers moving into, as well as staying and advancing in, good jobs. Such comprehensive support is particularly important in areas where a strong economy and high unemployment rates have left a smaller pool of potential entry-level workers, most of whom are harder to employ because of substance abuse, mental health, illness, and other complex problems. Although many of these individuals traditionally have been screened out of consideration from job training programs, an increasing demand for entry-level workers means that more funding will need to be allocated to help job training programs and organizations move this harder-to-employ group into jobs.

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Acknowledgments

Stronger Links: New Ways to Connect Low-Skilled Workers to Better Jobs is a joint effort of several individuals and organizations, including Annie E. Casey Foundation *Jobs Initiative* Director Robert Giloth and Program Associate Susan Gewirtz; Judy Taylor, Jobs for the Future; Scott Hebert and Doug Welch, Abt Associates, Inc.; and Bob Harrington, Metis Associates. The author especially wishes to thank the many representatives of the six *Jobs Initiative* sites and their colleagues who contributed their time and thoughtful insights to this publication.

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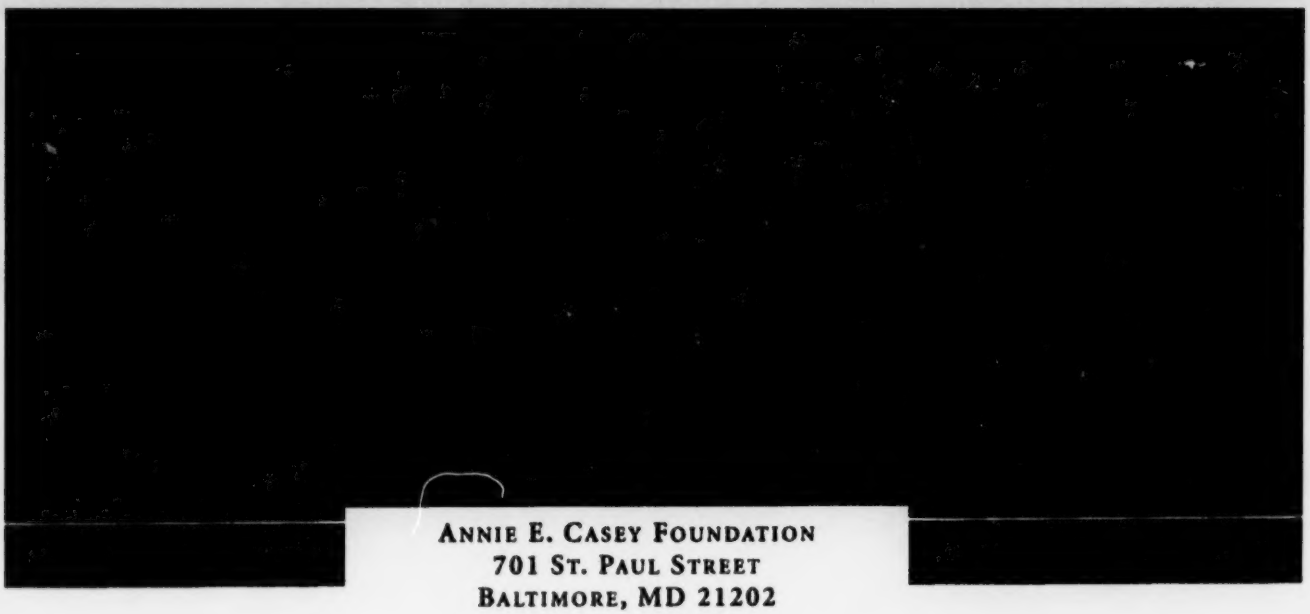
Printing: Pavsner Press, Inc.



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